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Integrated Management Information System project

Eighth report of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions

1. The Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions has considered the tenth progress report of the Secretary-General on the Integrated Management Information System (IMIS) project, contained in document A/53/573. The Advisory Committee also had before it a report by independent experts, submitted in accordance with General Assembly resolution 52/227 of 27 April 1998 (A/53/662). During the course of its consideration of the reports, the Advisory Committee met with the Under-Secretary-General for the Department of Management and with other representatives of the Secretary-General, who provided additional information.

2. The Advisory Committee welcomes the presentation of the tenth progress report and the report by the independent experts and commends both the Secretary-General and the experts for the user-friendly format and clarity of content and structure of the two reports. The tenth progress report contains an overall description of the status of IMIS development and implementation and a description of the programme of work over the next two years, accompanied by revised budget estimates; also included is information on activities undertaken since the ninth progress report on IMIS (A/52/711). In addition, the report provides a description of the actions taken to address the recommendations of the General Assembly, the Board of Auditors and the independent experts.

3. The Advisory Committee notes the findings, conclusions and recommendations of the independent experts. Their management study has, among other findings, concluded that IMIS is a well designed and robust computer application system, which is used satisfactorily by a large number of users with differing substantive interests (para. 236); there is no presently available commercial software which offers the full extent of integration of United Nations administrative and business data as that provided by IMIS (para. 237); a major accomplishment is that IMIS has not failed like many similar information management/information technologies (IM/IT) initiatives elsewhere (para. 241); the development and implementation of IMIS has been accomplished by a relatively small IMIS project team (para. 242); for the first time in two or three decades, the business rules of the

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administrative, human resources and financial systems of the United Nations and their application are adequately documented (para. 243); the level of investment of US$ 68 million in IMIS so far is reasonable for the outputs which have been produced (para. 246). The experts have also identified some problems related to IMIS management and implementation (see for example paras. 17, 20–22, 46, 78 and 83–85 of their study).

4. The Advisory Committee examined the response of the Secretariat to all eleven recommendations of the expert study, including the basis for the request for resources to implement IMIS to project completion in the year 2000. The experts observed in paragraph 266 of the study that the most critical and challenging issue facing the United Nations Secretariat concerning IMIS is to attain an acceptable implementation of most of the IMIS system at the offices away from Headquarters in 1999. Accordingly, the study gives priority to the issue of IMIS implementation at those offices. Recommendations 1, 2, 3, 4 and 7 address this objective. The Advisory Committee notes that, of the additional $9.5 million requested for IMIS, $6.5 million is directly related to the implementation of IMIS at offices away from Headquarters.

5. The Advisory Committee stresses the importance of implementing all of the expert's recommendations, including those on appropriate IT infrastructure, long-term maintenance and inter-agency governance framework. The Committee was informed by the Under-Secretary-General of the Department of Management that proposals concerning inter-agency governance would be submitted to the Advisory Committee for review. The Committee points out that after installation of IMIS at offices away from Headquarters, priority should be given to the development of remote access and to the needs of peacekeeping operations as well as of the tribunals. The Advisory Committee recommends that in his next progress report on IMIS and in the proposed programme budget for 2000–2001, the Secretary-General provide information on what would be required for and the implications of making IMIS a field as well as a Headquarters system. The Committee notes the observation of the Secretary-General, in paragraph 63 of annex I to the tenth progress report, that remote connectivity to IMIS is preferred in view of the low investment involved compared to the alternative of the deployment of complex administrative applications to duty stations.

6. The Advisory Committee notes the comments of the independent experts in paragraph 251 of the study concerning a notion often invoked by agency representatives that commercially available packages are a viable and less costly alternative to adapting IMIS to the needs of the agency concerned. In its recent meetings with representatives of the specialized agencies, the Advisory Committee was informed that one of the disadvantages of adapting IMIS was that the system was not sufficiently field oriented and that the cost of IMIS adaptation was higher than opting for commercially available packages (see A/53/7, paras. 71 to 73). The Committee is of the view that Member States would save millions of dollars if the United Nations and its agencies were to use common types of information management systems for their personnel, financial and other management functions.

7. Subject to the foregoing, the Advisory Committee recommends that the General Assembly endorse the recommendations of the study by the independent experts. The Secretary-General should be requested to present, in the context of the eleventh progress report on IMIS, detailed information on the implementation of the expert recommendations.

8. The General Assembly, in its resolution 52/227, requested the Secretary-General to include in his tenth progress report a detailed plan of action and the final level of resources needed to resolve all outstanding problems so as to make the system fully operational, taking into account, among others, the report of the independent experts.

9. According to the Secretary-General, the main activities planned for the next two years are the following:

(a) Implementation of Release 3 (Finance and support services applications) at all offices away from Headquarters, except Nairobi, in 1999, and in Nairobi in early 2000;

(b) Implementation of Releases 4 (Payroll) and 5 (Operational applications) at Headquarters by August 1999 and at all offices away from Headquarters by August 2000;

(c) Completion of 90 reports, which are in preparation and development of more than 110 additional standard reports by December 1999;

(d) United Nations Secretariat to assume maintenance of IMIS by December 1999;

(e) Creation, by January 2000, of a common service with other user organizations for the maintenance of the system (subject to approval by the governing bodies of each organization);

(f) Technical enhancements to improve system performance and reliability and to ensure that the system is year 2000 compliant;

(g) Establishment of an ongoing training programme in IMIS as part of overall staff training;

(h) Completion of the research already undertaken for remote access to IMIS using recent technological innovations.

10. The Advisory Committee notes, from paragraph 12 of the tenth progress report and paragraphs 50 to 54, annex I thereto, that a number of measures have been undertaken by the Secretariat to ensure that IMIS is fully year 2000 compliant and the work is expected to be completed during the second quarter of 1999. The Committee notes that, as a back-up measure, the Secretariat is making the current payroll Legacy System year 2000 compliant.

11. A detailed description of staff training in IMIS is contained in paragraphs 55 to 60 of annex I to the tenth progress report. The Advisory Committee points out that training activities take into account the related request of the General Assembly, prior recommendations of the Advisory Committee, the Board of Auditors and of the Office of Internal Oversight Services.

12. The Secretary-General estimates the revised total cost of the project development and implementation, on the basis of the report of the independent experts, at $77.6 million, reflecting an increase of $9.5 million over the amount of $68.1 million approved to date by the General Assembly. Of the additional $9.5 million, $6.5 million relates to the biennium 1998–1999 and the balance of $3 million would be required during the biennium 2000–2001.

13. As can be seen from the table in part III, "Budgetary matters", of the tenth report, the net additional requirements of $9.5 million are attributable mainly to general temporary assistance ($6.4 million) and contractual services ($5.9 million) and reflect also the impact of reduced requirements under travel ($1.3 million), training ($0.7 million), hardware ($0.3 million) and software ($0.5 million).

14. The increased requirements under general temporary assistance are mainly attributable to IMIS implementation at offices away from Headquarters, as is indicated in table 1 of annex III to the tenth progress report. The Committee notes that the proposed staffing includes an upgrading of one P-4 post to the P-5 level for a staff member to serve as head of the implementation team for offices away from Headquarters. The Advisory Committee has no objection to the proposed staffing requirements under general temporary assistance.

15. The additional $5.9 million for contractual services would be required, as indicated in paragraph 27 of the tenth progress report, for the development of additional reports, for out-of-scope items that may arise during the extensive testing foreseen for Release 4 (Payroll), including bridges, interfaces, reports and monitoring tools and for keeping on board, for a period of one year, four contractors to facilitate the transition to total United Nations maintenance of the system after the departure of the main contractor, as recommended by the independent experts. Paragraphs 8 to 11 of annex III to the tenth progress report provide additional information on the overall estimated requirements of $8.2 million for contractual services for the period from 1998 to project completion. The Advisory Committee has no objection to the proposed requirements under contractual services.

16. The estimated requirements for travel, training, hardware and software are explained in paragraphs 28 to 30 of the tenth progress report. The Advisory Committee has no objection to these requirements.

17. Taking into account the comments, observations and recommendations reflected in paragraphs above, the Advisory Committee recommends that the General Assembly approve an additional amount of $9.5 million for the completion of IMIS, thus bringing the total cost of the project development and implementation to $77.6 million. The need for an additional appropriation under the programme budget for 1998–1999 should be considered in the context of the first performance report for the biennium 1998–1999.

18. The Committee points out that the regular budget contains a provision of $9.8 million for maintenance of IMIS during the biennium 1998–1999. The Advisory Committee recommends that, in his eleventh progress report on IMIS, the Secretary-General should propose a long-term maintenance plan for IMIS, which would also take into account the need to ensure that IMIS will be updated with the latest advances in technology.